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How to Have Influence

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W e live in a quick-fix world where people look for easy solutions to solve complex problems. This goes for both business and personal problems. We want one trick to get employees to adopt behavior that improves quality and causes customers to gush with appreciation, or one trick to help us shed 30 unwanted pounds. Unfortunately, most quick fixes don't work because the problem is rarely fed by a single cause. Usually, there is a conspiracy of causes.

If you want to confront persistent problem behavior, you need to combine multiple influences into an overwhelming strategy. In management and in their personal lives, influencers succeed where others fail because they "overdetermine" success.[1] Instead of looking for the minimum it will take to accomplish a change, they combine a critical mass of different kinds of influence strategies.

We have documented the success of this multipronged approach across organizational levels (from C-level managers to first-line supervisors) and across different problem domains (from entrenched cultural issues in companies to leader-led change initiatives to stubborn personal challenges like stopping smoking and getting fit). And while the results are impressive, they do not rely on an obscure calculus — if anything, they are built on simple arithmetic. Effective influencers drive change by relying on several different sources of influence strategies at the same time. Those who succeed predictably and repeatedly don't differ from others by degrees. By combining multiple sources of influence, they are up to 10 times more successful at producing substantial and sustainable change.

This claim is based on three studies. (See "About the Research," p. 48.) We began by looking at nagging organizational problems, such as bureaucratic infighting, lack of collaboration and low compliance with quality or safety standards. Although more than 90% of the executives we interviewed described their problems as powerfully "destructive," even "cancerous," few had done much to confront them. We got similar results when we surveyed executives and senior managers. About 40% of these executives had made some attempt to influence change in these destructive behaviors. In doing so, however, the vast majority had employed only one influence strategy — for example, they offered training, redesigned the organization or held a high-visibility retreat. A handful — fewer than 5% — had used four or more sources of influence in combination. The differences in outcomes were astounding.

Study participants who used four or more sources of influence in combination

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The difference between effective and ineffective change makers is that the effective ones don't rely on a single source of influence. They marshal several sources at once to get superior results.

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were 10 times more likely to succeed than those who relied on a single source of influence.[2]

We continued our exploration into how executives exert influence in a subsequent survey about corporate change initiatives such as restructurings, quality or productivity programs and new-product launches — all of which demand new behaviors from employees to be successful. Again, we asked senior leaders to describe the influence strategies they relied on. Nearly 40% reported using only one strategy; only 20% combined more than four strategies. As in the previous study, the few leaders who combined four or more influence strategies were dramatically more successful than those who used one strategy.[3]

In our third study, we shifted the focus from organizational to personal challenges: how people change personal habits such as

About the Research

This article is based on three separate studies. Our first study was built around interviews with 25 C-level leaders about their leading challenges. Among the challenges we wanted to explore were bureaucratic infighting, silo thinking and lack of accountability. We constructed a survey to measure the scope of these issues and, more importantly, to see what organizations did to deal with them. We administered this survey to 900 managers and supervisors. Fully 90% of the managers surveyed said their organizations struggled with at least one entrenched habit; most said the problem negatively impacted employee satisfaction, productivity, quality and customer satisfaction. Although a high percentage of managers said they did little or nothing to confront these challenges, those who applied multiple sources of influence strategies (more than four sources) were 10 times more likely to see results than those using just one. In our second study, we studied a larger sample of C-level leaders to explore how they approached change initiatives. We focused on 100 mission-critical initiatives — efforts such as internal restructurings, quality and productivity improvement initiatives and new-product launches. We wanted to see which sources of influence the companies used to support their initiatives — and how many. Here, too, we found that a high percentage of executives used only one approach; those who used four or more had the greatest likelihood of success.

Finally, we surveyed more than 1,000 individuals about personal habits they were struggling to change, such as unhealthy eating, insufficient exercise, smoking and overdrinking. More than half reported that they had struggled with their habit for five years or more, many for longer. We asked what they did to overcome their habits, which approaches were most effective and how many different strategies they used. Here again, single solutions proved ineffective. Those who combined different sources of influence (more than four) had the best results by far.

overeating, smoking, overspending or drinking too much alcohol. We randomly surveyed more than 1,000 individuals, asking them to describe the strategies they had tried. Many had attempted to alter their own behavior by using a single approach (for example, join a gym, follow prescriptions in a book or attend AA meetings) — and nearly all had failed. Only 14% had tackled their problem using four or more strategies; for them, the success rate was 40% compared with 10% for those using one strategy.

Sources of Influence

Our model organizes influence strategies into six sources. Motivation and ability make up the backbone of this model. We then subdivide these domains into three distinct categories: personal, social and structural, which in turn reflect separate and highly developed bodies of literature (psychology, sociology and organizational theory). (See "The Six Sources of Influence.") The first two domains, personal motivation and ability, relate to sources of influence within individuals (motives and abilities) that determine their behavioral choices. The next two, social motivation and ability, relate to how other people affect an individual's choices. And the final two, structural motivation and ability, encompass the role of nonhuman factors, such as compensation systems, the role of physical proximity on behavior and technology. Effective leaders need to learn how the different sources operate and how to identify implementation obstacles. (See "Understanding the Sources of Influence," p. 50.)

Source 1: Link to Mission and Values Leaders frequently have a hard time getting people to adopt a new behavior. Many healthful behaviors are boring, uncomfortable or even painful. And many unhealthful behaviors can be pleasurable — at least in the short term. When a leader asks employees to undertake dramatic quality improvement efforts, there is an enormous amount of discomfort, conflict and uncertainty. People are pushed to rethink processes, uncover problems and reapportion power in the organization. Reasonable people resist things that are uncomfortable or stressful, which is why most of these efforts fail.[4]

Ineffective influencers assume there is no way to change someone's attitude toward a behavior so they compensate for people's lack of personal motivation by putting pressure on them (social motivation) or bribe/threaten them (structural motivation). Skilled influencers help people transform their attitudes toward a behavior. They are effective at helping people become personally motivated to enact new behaviors.

Influencers understand that human beings are capable of fundamentally transforming their experience of almost any activity. Behaviors that are uncomfortable can be framed as meaningful; behaviors that are boring can become compelling; and behaviors that are painful can become rewarding. The key is to help people see the broad implications of their actions and choices.

We saw this with Matt VanVranken, president of Spectrum

Health Systems, in Grand Rapids, Michigan. His challenge was to influence 10,000 weary, overworked and overstressed health care professionals to go beyond their basic job descriptions to create exceptional patient experiences. How does VanVranken persuade people to make the right decision every time? He makes it personal and connects what they do to individual patients.

For example, VanVranken periodically brings together several hundred managers and directors. At the start of a recent meeting, a man in his early 60s began to talk about his accident several months earlier when his motorcycle was hit by a car that ran a red light. He then described his experience with the staff of Spectrum Hospital. He introduced the physicians and nurses who attended him and also singled out countless others — the employees who provided warm blankets before his surgeries and the people who ordered Popsicles he could eat when he wasn't allowed solid foods. Employees were poignantly reminded of how their actions affected the health and well-being of individual patients.

When leaders want to influence people to make significant changes, they need to help them connect the changes to their deeply held values. This establishes a moral framework that shifts people's experience of the new behaviors. If leaders fail to engage people's values, they must compensate for a lack of personal motivation with less profound and sustainable sources of motivation, such as carrots and sticks.
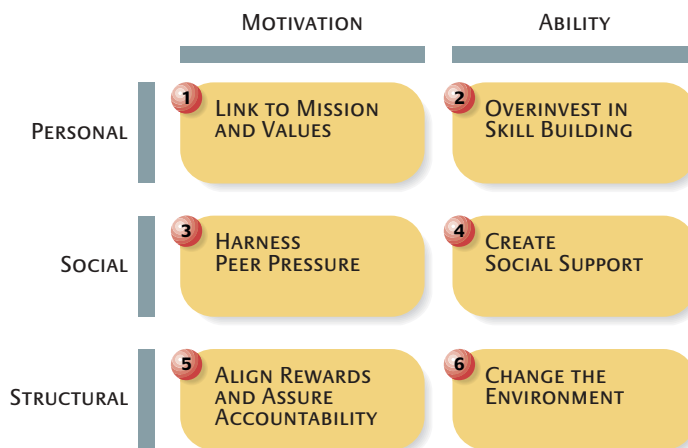
Although personal motivation can be powerful, it's rarely enough. Successful influencers find ways to engage personal motivation, but then combine it with several additional sources of influence.

Source 2: Overinvest in Skill Building Far too many leaders equate influence with motivation. Most aren't aware of this tacit assumption. We have an iconic image of the leader at the podium revving up his or her troops, and then sending them off to conquer. To these types of leaders, the name of the game is motivation. But true influencers don't make that mistake. They understand that new behaviors can be far more intellectually, physically or emotionally challenging than they appear on the surface. So they invest heavily in increasing personal ability. If anything, they *overinvest* in ability to avoid making this mistake.

In fact, our study showed that a robust training initiative is at the heart of almost all successful influence strategies.[5] Mike Miller, vice president of business customer billing at AT&T Inc., succeeded in turning around a 3,000-person IT function by creating a culture where everyone spoke up early and honestly about the risks they saw affecting project goals. Early in the change initiative, Miller saw that people needed more than the *motivation* to speak up. He realized people also needed the *ability* to step up to crucial conversations. In the heat of the moment, speaking up about

The Six Sources of Influence

Leaders who combine four or more sources of influence are up to 10 times more likely to succeed than those relying on just one.

	MOTIVATION	ABILITY
PERSONAL	1 LINK TO MISSION AND VALUES	2 OVERINVEST IN SKILL BUILDING
SOCIAL	3 HARNESS PEER PRESSURE	4 CREATE SOCIAL SUPPORT
STRUCTURAL	5 ALIGN REWARDS AND ASSURE ACCOUNTABILITY	6 CHANGE THE ENVIRONMENT

emotionally risky issues requires as much skill as motivation. So Miller made sure people got the right kind of training.

Research shows that training is far less effective when it's given in one large dose — people retain less than 10% of what they learn in concentrated classes.[6] Learning that is scheduled over time is markedly more successful. So Miller decided to train slowly, in one- to two-hour segments over several months. His goal was not to "finish" the training, but to keep people focused on it long enough to absorb it — and to adopt new behaviors. He also trained realistically, focusing on real business problems. For example, participants role-played on such issues as how to challenge unrealistic deadlines, how to report project risks and how to hold peers accountable when tasks fall behind schedule. Within six months, internal surveys showed that behavior was changing markedly, and within nine months virtually every software release in Miller's group was coming in on time, on budget and with no serious errors.

Source 3: Harness Peer Pressure It is tempting to conclude that a strong dose of personal motivation and a substantial investment in personal ability is enough to tip us into new behavior. But effective influencers understand that no matter how motivated and able individuals are, they'll still encounter enormous social influences that can block change efforts.

Whether people acknowledge it or not, they often do things to earn praise from friends and coworkers. When a senior engineer tells a junior engineer that "production work is for dropouts," something very important happens. The junior engineer begins to form impressions about the choices that bring honor and prestige, and conversely about choices that lead to a less respected career path. When a new hire challenges an idea in a meeting only to be

Understanding the Sources of Influence

Effective influencers diagnose before they influence. The chart below shows the types of questions savvy leaders use to identify obstacles and strategies for creating positive leverage.

Sources of Influence	Strategies Successful Leaders Employed
Source 1 Personal Motivation: The questions savvy leaders ask themselves • In a room by themselves would people *want* to engage in the behavior? • Do they hate it or enjoy it? • Do they find meaning in it? • Does it fit into their sense of who they are or want to be?	• Identified the aspects of the change that were boring, uncomfortable or painful and found ways to either eliminate them or make them more pleasant. • Found ways to connect the need for change with people's core values — for example, had people meet with the individuals who would benefit from the change or who were experiencing problems due to a lack of change. • Created a strong sense of mission and purpose about the need for change that touched people and motivated them to engage in the process. • Took great pains to get people's personal buy-in to the changes rather than issuing them as mandates.
Source 2 Personal Ability: The questions savvy leaders ask themselves • Do they have the knowledge, skills and strength to be able to do the right thing? • Can they handle the toughest challenges they will face?	• Gave guided practice and immediate feedback until people were sure they could engage in the new behaviors in the toughest of circumstances. • Designed learning experiences that helped people successfully manage any communication, emotional and interpersonal hurdles they would face in changing their behavior. • Had everyone involved in the change participate in real-time drills or simulations that tested whether they could perform as required under challenging circumstances.
Source 3 Social Motivation: The questions savvy leaders ask themselves • Are other people encouraging the right behavior or discouraging the wrong behavior? • Do people whom others respect model the right behaviors at the right time? • Do people have good relationships with those who are trying to influence them positively?	• Gained substantial support and involvement of enough opinion leaders from throughout the organization that the credibility of the effort was unquestioned. Enlisted these opinion leaders as role models, teachers and supporters of change. • Had all members of management from front-line supervisors to the most senior managers go to great lengths to teach, model and coach people toward new behavior. • Identified people who would be most concerned about the changes, and made sure they were involved early. • Made it clear to everyone that these behavioral changes were something top management strongly supported and modeled.
Source 4 Social Ability: The questions savvy leaders ask themselves • Do others provide the help, information and resources required — particularly at critical times?	• Used mentors or coaches to provide just-in-time assistance when people stumbled with the new behaviors. • Identified the toughest obstacles to change and made sure people had others to support them whenever they faced these obstacles. • Created "safe" ways for people to get help without feeling embarrassed or being put on the spot. • Provided everyone with the authority, information and resources they would need to step up to new behaviors as easily as possible.
Source 5 Structural Motivation: The questions savvy leaders ask themselves • Are there rewards — pay, promotions, performance reviews or perks? • Are there costs? • Do rewards encourage the right behaviors and costs discourage the wrong ones?	• Adjusted the formal rewards system to make sure people had incentives to adopt the new behaviors. • Made sure people had "skin in the game" by tracking their use of the new behaviors and linking it to rewards and punishments they cared about. • Used a "carrot and stick" approach to make sure people knew the organization was serious about demanding change. • Made sure everyone understood that even the most senior managers would be held accountable if they failed to support these changes — there were no exceptions.
Source 6 Structural Ability: The questions savvy leaders ask themselves • Does the environment (tools, facilities, information, reports, proximity to others, policies, work processes) enable good behavior or bad? • Are there enough cues and reminders to help people stay on course?	• Reorganized people's workplaces to remove obstacles and to make the change convenient and easy. • Provided new software or hardware or other new resources to make the change simpler and more automatic. • Changed existing systems to make it difficult to avoid making the changes needed. • Used cues, regular communications and metrics to keep the need for change "top of mind" for everyone in the organization. • Created potent ways of giving all levels of management feedback about how successfully or unsuccessfully they were leading change.

ostracized by her colleagues, another message is delivered. The sense of isolation is likely to influence how freely that person will speak in future meetings. When senior physicians don't wash their hands before treating patients, the likelihood that their residents will wash up is less than 10%.[7] Social influence is powerful.

Effective influencers understand that what shapes and sustains the behavioral norms of an organization are lots of small interactions. They realize that unless and until they get the social actions positively aligned, their chance of influencing change is slim.

When Ralph Heath was assigned the job of getting the F-22 Raptor off the drawing boards and into production in 18 months, he knew it was a formidable challenge. It was compounded by the fact that he needed the active support of 5,000 Lockheed Martin Corp. employees, many of whom saw the move to production as a threat to the stability of the jobs they knew and loved. Leaders in the organization placed a high value on engineering, ideas, tinkering and design. Production technicians were more practical. Heath knew he couldn't gain the trust and support of everyone. So he decided to invest in the most influential people — both the formal leaders and the opinion leaders.

Heath met monthly with 350 supervisors, managers and directors. He brought in customers from the various military agencies and encouraged them to explain their frustrations and concerns with the program. In these sessions, Heath described the kinds of behaviors that were slowing the transition and which ones needed to change. He spoke candidly about the problems he saw and demonstrated a willingness to be challenged when his own actions conflicted with the behavior he asked of people. As Heath won the trust of supervisors, they began to influence others. Heath also worked closely with opinion leaders, making time available to visit informally with them every week. After only four months of working with opinion leaders, marked changes began to occur.

In the end, the performance of Heath's group exceeded expectations. The group met production deadlines, and the resulting product was a success. The F-22's reliability is better than that of the F-15, which has been in use for decades; its operating costs are lower; its repair times are shorter; and its mission capabilities are far superior.

Source 4: Create Social Support It's tempting to think that social influence is mostly about motivation. Clearly, the things groups praise and punish do a lot to shape future behavior. However, if you focus only on the motivating power of the people around you, you limit your own influence. The reality is that people around you don't just motivate; they can undermine behavior as well.

At AT&T, for example, Mike Miller was the information technology executive charged with improving his group's track record in meeting quality, schedule and cost targets. He found that one behavior essential for employees was the ability to discuss mission-critical issues rapidly and honestly with coworkers. Even when leaders spoke

about this behavior, they didn't always enable it. For it to have real meaning, Miller felt that leaders had to be accessible. They had to get out of their offices and be available when people needed their help.

Miller concluded that leaders had to become teachers. So every week or two, he tried to introduce a new skill. He gave his direct reports lesson materials and tasked them with teaching the skill to people who reported to them. Over the next six weeks, the process cascaded down through the ranks until the lesson was implanted throughout the organization. As the process took hold, two powerful things happened.

First, the process of teaching influenced the *teachers*. Leaders identified more closely with the concepts and began to feel more responsible for embracing them and encouraging others to do likewise. The real teaching moments were rarely during the training itself. They occurred more often when someone had to decide how to approach a problem. When leaders were the teachers, they tended to spot these moments more predictably and seize them. They became enablers of change. Second, the process also influenced the *learners*. In addition to getting real-time coaching, employees got real-time encouragement. A respected person (often their boss) was urging them to try something new exactly when they needed the encouragement. The combination of social motivation and social ability became a powerful force for change in Miller's organization. Soon other divisions within AT&T were soliciting Miller's help in influencing change in their areas.

Source 5: Align Rewards and Ensure Accountability If you want to understand people's priorities and why they put their effort into some areas as opposed to others, it usually helps to "follow the money." If a leader talks about quality but rewards productivity, employees will notice. Chronic problems such as lack of accountability, poor productivity and slipshod quality can often be traced to poorly designed incentives that reward the wrong behaviors.

It is difficult to change behavior without changing the incentives. In fact, creating incentives is often the only real way senior leaders can separate serious priorities from pipe dreams. The CEO might stick his neck out and say, "Starting now, at least 25% of our incentive pay should be contingent on achieving these new measures." This statement will instantly redirect the focus of senior managers. At Spectrum Health Systems, AT&T and Lockheed Martin, management made a point of tracking both results and behaviors. Progress was reviewed three to four times a year, sometimes more frequently. Moreover, leaders elected to put their own skin in the game: The top two levels of management had at least 25% of their pay at risk.

But it's not just the top people who need to have a stake in changing entrenched behaviors. Employees at all levels need to see incentives for changing. The external rewards need to be both real and valuable, and they need to send a supportive message. People won't support change if the behavior management wants to encourage doesn't make their lives better (in the form of opportunities, money,

promotions and so on). However, our advice is to use incentives third, not first. Otherwise, you might actually undermine people's intrinsic motivation.[8] Begin with personal and social sources of motivation, and then reinforce them with well-designed incentive systems.

Source 6: Change the Environment Three times more people die from lung cancer than from road accidents. Twice as many people die from tuberculosis as from fires. However, this is contrary to the popular view. The reason: The daily information people see — the data stream — is at odds with reality. For example, a typical newspaper has 42 articles about road accidents for every article about lung cancer.[9]

If you want to change an organization's mental agenda, you need to change the data that routinely crosses people's desks. Unlike training or coaching, this involves giving people a different diet of information to help them track problems and solutions. Pat Ryan, vice chairman of OGE Energy Corp., which owns an Oklahoma City-based electric utility, was concerned about the utility's reputation for being insufficiently customer driven. When streetlights were out, people always blamed the company and said it was unresponsive to the problem. In an effort to turn things around, Ryan established a companywide target of having streetlights repaired within five days and created a new weekly reporting mechanism to help managers monitor the problem. The report listed by area streetlights that had been dark for more than five days. Within a short time, all but two areas had fixed the problem. What's more, these improvements led to further quality improvements. Citizens and police officers began to see that when they reported dark streetlights, the problems got fixed. So they improved their reporting, and the entire system became more responsive.

At OGE, the data stream about streetlights didn't exist, so management had to create it. In other settings, data streams may already exist — they are just waiting for someone to take control of them and put them to effective use. Consider the case of an international logistics company that serves the electronics industry. Although the company was meeting all of its internal customer metrics, an alarming number of customers (more than 12% per year) were defecting to competitors. The vice president of quality was puzzled, so he decided to explore how the customer metrics were calculated. Here's what he found: A salesperson would ask a customer, "How quickly do you need your deliveries?" The customer would reply, "Within two days." The salesperson would analyze the request, and often he or she would say, "Sorry, we can't do it in two days — how about four?" Frequently, the customer would say that was OK.

When it came to tracking the data, this company measured how well it kept its word to the customer — in this case, whether it delivered packages within four days — and the record was nearly perfect. So why was it losing customers? Well, despite what customers agreed to, some of them really *wanted* two-day delivery. Rather than measuring the actual delivery time against the *promised*

delivery time, the VP began keeping track of a new number: the delivery time against the customers' *preferred* delivery times. Using this metric, performance fell to below 50%, which helped to explain the increasing number of customer defections. While this performance metric was discouraging to many of the company's employees, it had a positive effect. It reset their mental agendas and motivated the whole organization to revamp the fulfillment system.

Sometimes changing the data stream to influence behavior isn't enough. Then companies need to make structural changes. Spectrum Health recently went so far as to create a separate new physical space where people can work on new ideas without the normal distractions and receive the back-end support they need. In the first year, says Kris White, vice president of patient affairs, company employees identified 35 ideas to pursue commercially and received provisional patents on three of them.

NOVICE INVESTORS FREQUENTLY make the mistake of betting on a single stock rather than creating a diversified portfolio of investments. Leaders of organizations frequently make similar miscalculations in trying to influence change. Too often they bet on a single source of influence rather than tapping a diverse arsenal of strategies. We have learned that the main variable in success or failure is not which sources of influence leaders choose. By far the more important factor is how many.

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1. Freud popularized the term "overdetermine" by arguing that a single symbol in a dream, poem or painting can have multiple valid meanings — that symbols are often the product of several diverse influences. He borrowed the term from geometry, where it is said that "two points determine a line" and "three points overdetermine it."

2. Their success rate jumped from 4% to 40%.

3. In this case, leaders who used four or more sources of influence were four times more successful than leaders who used a single source. The success rate improved from 14% to 63%.

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5. Seventy-seven percent of the successful initiatives in our sample included training as one of their influence strategies.

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9. These "observations" come from A. Tversky and D. Kahneman's classic article, "Judgment Under Uncertainty: Heuristics and Biases," Science, New Series185, no. 4157 (Sept. 27, 1974): 1124-1131.

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